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United for Quality Care

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SEIU 1199NE

Before the Human Services and  
Aging Committee

***In Support of SB 989 An Act Concerning Nursing Homes***

Good Afternoon Senator Lesser, Senator Hochadel, Representative Gilcrest, Representative Garibay, and members of the Human Services and Aging Committees. My name is Natasha Royal and I am the Vice President of the Service Employees International Union District 1199NE, representing 26,000 healthcare workers across the state, including approximately 7,000 nursing home workers.

Due to understaffing, nursing homes have struggled for decades to meet the needs of Connecticut's residents. Even before the global COVID pandemic, nursing homes were not staffed to handle the ever growing demand for care. Not only was the acuity of residents increasing, but the population underwent dramatic changes as nursing homes began caring for residents with mental health conditions and substance addiction.

Now in wake of the pandemic, nursing homes are struggling worse than ever. Residents in nursing homes deserve quality care, and the nurses and aides who care for them deserve to work in a safe work environment. Neither are possible with the current staffing levels. Short staffing leads to burnout and turnover amongst staff. Homes struggle to retain the talented caregivers they have because the ratio of residents to caregivers is unsustainable. Connecticut needs to raise the minimum hours of care per resident per day, and ensure that nursing homes are staffed appropriately to meet this standard. Section nine in this bill would raise the minimum hours of care to 4.1 per resident per day, which would meet the recommendation made by the Center for Medicare Services (CMS) in 2001.

However, it is not enough to raise the care standard if we are unable to enforce it. We know nursing home operators are not staffing homes to the current staffing standard, and this practice will continue if strong enforcement mechanisms are not in place. Section nine of this bill would address this by making understaffing a Class B violation, incurring the home a ten thousand dollar fine. This fine should come out of the homes Administrative and General fund as to not impact the homes direct care budget. Empowering the Department of Health in this way signals to the residents living in nursing homes and the nurses and aides who care for them that the state is serious about their wellbeing.

In addition to the provisions I've already mentioned, SB 989 will bring much needed funding transparency to Connecticut's nursing homes. Due to the vague nature of nursing home cost reports, the state does not have a clear picture of how nursing homes are spending the hundreds of millions of dollars in medicaid funding they receive every year. Furthermore, while nursing home

1) Rau, Jordan. "Nursing home owners drained cash from understaffed facilities, analysis suggests : Shots - Health News." *NPR*, 31 January 2023, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2023/01/31/1139783599/new-york-nursing-home-owners-drained-cash>. Accessed 15 February 2023.

operators will claim they are broke, the owners of those homes outsource crucial services such as nursing staff, management, and medical supplies to affiliated corporations, known as "related parties," that they own, invest in or control. According to federal regulators, homes pay related parties over \$12 billion a year nationwide<sup>1</sup>. The provisions included in sections six, seven, and eight in this bill would greatly improve the state's ability to reign in money mismanagement in nursing homes, and provide the data needed to plan for the future.

On behalf of the 7,000 nursing home workers 1199 represents, and the tens of thousands of residents they care for, I urge you to pass SB 989.

Thank you.

1) Rau, Jordan. "Nursing home owners drained cash from understaffed facilities, analysis suggests : Shots - Health News." *NPR*, 31 January 2023, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2023/01/31/1139783599/new-york-nursing-home-owners-drained-cash>. Accessed 15 February 2023.